



United Way of Iredell County

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www.uwiredell.org

***Serving Troutman, Statesville
& northern Iredell County***

United Way of Iredell County

Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary
Office of the Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20554

December 6, 2018

Re: WC Docket No. 18-336 and CC Docket No. 92-105 regarding the National Suicide Hotline Improvement Act of 2018.

Dear Madam,

The United Way of Iredell County appreciates the opportunity to comment on the current effort undertaken by the Federal Communications Commission to study the feasibility of designating a three-digit number to the National Suicide Hotline and to assess the effectiveness of the current National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. In Iredell County, NC our United Way is fighting for the health, education and financial stability by investing in 211 and investing in 21 local agency partners who impact the citizens of our county from a child's first book, through a senior's last breath.

Our organization has a 65 year history of reaching out to the underserved and today we partner with hundreds of local businesses, non-profit, government, faith-based and community based partners to drive systemic changes to solve our community's toughest problems like mental health and crisis.

We encourage the FCC to consider our 211 work here in Iredell County as a vital partner in increasing access to suicide prevention and intervention services. Since we partnered with 211 in 2014, we have invested \$10,000.00 in the success of 211 and answer 400 requests for help each year. Moreover, each year our United Way invests more than \$1,000,000.00 in mental health, substance use, health, education, and other financial stability services. These critical investments position us to be key partners in the success of an improved mental health and crisis response system.

In North Carolina, the United Way network across the state has built a robust statewide 2-1-1 system that serves all 100 counties, ensuring that every North Carolinian has access to a trained call specialist equipped to provide necessary support and information 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Our United Way network proudly invests in this system each year with our dollars to support the system's infrastructure, by raising awareness of 2-1-1 as a vital community resource, and by working to ensure the 2-1-1 database best reflects the health and human services resources available in our individual communities.

Specific to the issues related to suicide prevention and individuals facing that type of mental health crisis, North Carolina has a well-established Local Management Entity-Managed Care Organization (LME-MCO) network of providers representing every county in our State. The NC 2-1-1 system and call center staff are trained to follow specific protocols to route callers in crisis directly to the LME-MCO in their community to ensure quick response and mental health services. I believe the 2-1-1 system in NC is well equipped to serve as the primary number in North Carolina for all human service needs, including those facing a mental health crisis, and adding an additional 3-digit dialing code will only cause confusion for those in crisis.

Another three-digit code may erode the simplicity of a single point of access for community help. Despite concerted efforts by numerous social services, and multiple hotlines, in our community to educate and market the distinctions, a person in crisis will likely always reach for the most familiar or most accessible number. Our 211 receives calls that are better suited for 911, and our 911 partners often receive calls that we can best answer. We recommend that resources should be invested to improve a unified single point of access with a blended partnership of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline and United Way's 211 services. We believe in the power of partnership to address gaps, not duplicate services, and will be a valuable partner in the fight against suicide.

You can learn more about our work at www.uwiredell.org and can reach my office for additional questions or discussion at 704-872-3000. Thank you for your time in addressing this important issue and for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brett Eckerman", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Brett Eckerman, Executive Director
United Way of Iredell County, NC